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Boulder at Creekside

Patrick Williston

Lichenologists Anonymous

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Boulder at Creekside

Wayward current of magma
Surges upward,
Follows carious fractures
And touches the breath of surface.

In thin mountain air it tempers,
Lattice of broken glass
Frozen in facets
Shot with black constellations.

Rock is worked, patiently, intently,
By Sky's temperamental offerings:
Heat, water, wind, ice.
Furtive tendrils of lichen.

Then great ice-waves
Spill through passes,
Pluck boulders
From Mountain's pockets,

Sweep down valleys,
Churn ice-rock,
Crack and shatter
And strew fragments

That are washed
By meltwater torrents
Hissing with grit,
Burnishing soft every hard edge.

Water subsides,
And leaves a boulder at creekside.

Stillness. And then,
The first inquisitive roots.

A kaleidoscope of fern, forest and feather,
Burst from rock flour and gravel.
Labyrinth, tangled and haggling.

Rot's pungent musk.

Boulder at creekside,
As tender fronds unfurl,
Shoulders an orange-gold moss robe
Warmed by sifted sun.

PATRICK WILLISTON is a biologist and writer who examines the unfurling world tucked in the folds of the Western Cordillera.